

IF YOU GO
STAYING THERE

Chesapeake Wood Duck Inn
21490 Gibsontown Rd.,
800-956-2070
www.woodduckinn.com
Winter rates start at \$129, including breakfast. Closed Jan. 25-31.

Lazyjack Inn
5907 Tilghman Island Rd., 800-690-5080
www.lazyjackinn.com
Winter weekend rates start at \$166, including breakfast.

EATING THERE

Tilghman Island Inn
21384 Coopertown Rd.,
800-866-2141
www.tilghmanislandinn.com
Fine dining or cafe menu. Entrees start at \$19; \$10.50 in the cafe. Closed Jan. 17 through Feb. 4.

Harrison's Chesapeake House
21551 Chesapeake House Dr.,
410-886-2121
www.chesapeakehouse.com
This 1875 institution is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Friday is the oysters-nine-ways buffet, \$32.

PLAYING THERE

Tilghman Watermen's Museum
5778 Tilghman Island Rd., 410-886-2930
www.tilghmanmuseum.org
Open by appointment during the winter.

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
213 N. Talbot St., St. Michaels,
410-745-2916
www.cbmm.org
Exhibits on bay history, oystering, and boats. Hours until April: Friday-Monday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Adults \$13.

INFORMATION

www.tilghmanisland.com

TILGHMAN ISLAND

In search of doing nothing

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Several times a year, I grab an overnight bag, a book and an eager beagle and head east to Tilghman Island, Md., nestled between the Chesapeake Bay and the Choptank River. In every other season, I look forward to kayaking, biking and eating crabs. In the winter, I fantasize about doing absolutely nothing. So it was when I headed there recently with an ample supply of hot chocolate and an unopened copy of "Anna Karenina."

Tilghman is three miles long and one mile wide. It's a working fishing village of about 750, delightfully gritty and gruff, just south of genteel St. Michaels. Dogwood Harbor, at the center of the business district, is rare in that work boats still outnumber pleasure boats. This time of year, oyster boats come and go, but the harvest is just a fraction of what it once was.

Just after lunch, I arrive at my friends' house, which they generously offer when they're not in town. Their street is quiet, except for a slow parade of pickups heading to the harbor before daybreak and leaving in the afternoon. Darwin and I walk to the harbor, and she investigates the smells: netting, boats, shells, empty beer cans. It takes us 30 minutes to walk 50 yards.

That night, we walk to the Tilghman Island Inn for dinner in the lounge. A fire crackles in the corner, Irving Berlin's "Cheek to Cheek" plays behind the bar, and the house dog, Jasmine (a standard poodle), greets Darwin. I make a point to come here during every Tilghman visit because the food is so good and the atmosphere, inside or out, is so relaxing. One or both of the owners (D.C. transplants) can usually be found sitting at the bar.

Darwin settles on the faux zebra rug, near the baby grand. I order a mesclun salad, black-eyed peacakes with a Jerusalem artichoke relish and homemade peppermint ice cream. When I ask one of the owners, David McCallum, about business in the winter, he tells me that visitors come to get away from the rat race and to be near the water — no matter what the season.

"People say, 'What is there to do in Tilghman?' and I say, 'Nothing,'" David says. "They say, 'What?' And I say, 'When was the last time you did a little *nothing*?' " Besides, he says, "if you're into water views, this is where it's at." (Nearly every inn and restaurant here is on the waterfront.)

Before dawn the next morning, I hear diesel engines starting in the harbor, and Darwin and I walk over to watch the watermen start their work day.

On Tilghman, as in other small communities,



MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Tilghman Island in the Chesapeake Bay is home to watermen and scenic views, but not a lot of attractions — perfect for a low-key getaway.

no one is a stranger. Later in the day, I walk across the street to visit Jeff and Kim Bushey, who run the Chesapeake Wood Duck Inn. Jeff used to be a chef at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, and this morning he whips up banana bread French toast. The Busheys introduce me to their neighbor, Lawrence Tyler, a second-generation waterman who became a duck-hunting guide (DivingDuck.net) 20 years ago, when he saw the local seafood business starting to decline. He's wearing a mossy oak pattern jacket and cap, and his hands are weath-

ered well beyond his 57 years. He tries to soften his accent for me but still talks about his friend "Chawlee" and Maryland "erster" legislation.

After he and Jeff exchange waterfowl recipes, Tyler offers to take me out on his boat, where I warm up by a gas fire in the cockpit and listen to wonderful stories — about the old Tilghman Packing Co.; the Chesapeake Bay freezing over in the late '70s; and the journey of sea ducks from the Arctic Circle to the island. We motor through a flock of what he estimates is a few thousand birds.

That afternoon, I stop by to see Mike Richards, who runs the Lazyjack Inn with his wife. Mike, who takes guests out on lighthouse tours in the summer, brings me tea, and we talk about the lure of the island. "Tilghman is not for everyone," he says. "It's for people who go to the end of the road. How do you describe someone who always wonders what's around the bend?"

Back at the house, I realize that despite my pursuit of nothingness, I've been quite engaged. My weekend of doing zilch has turned into a weekend of plenty: leisurely conversations with islanders, eagle-watching spells, beagle olfactory tours and Tolstoy consumption.

And if that weren't enough, there is one final demand on my hectic schedule. At 4:30, I drive down to Black Walnut Point, the southern tip of the island, to catch the show that is arguably reason enough to visit Tilghman. I park along a deserted jetty and look west. On the horizon tilts the silhouette of Sharps Island lighthouse. The sky around it turns yellow, then orange, then red, as the sun sinks and disappears into the bay.

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M.K. CANNISTRA/THE WASHINGTON POST

GETTING THERE

Tilghman Island, Md., is a little more than 90 miles from Washington. Take Route 50 across the Bay Bridge. As you approach Easton, bear right onto Route 322. Turn right onto St. Michaels Road/Route 33 and follow that for about 22 miles, through St. Michaels, over the Knapps Narrows Bridge and onto Tilghman.

● **Sunday in Travel: The Impulsive Traveler books a tour of classic kid-lit sites in New York.**